

The Skinny

Comptroller honors district with transparency award

Austin Independent School District (AISD) received the GOLD Leadership Circle Award for Budget Transparency on Nov. 2. The award, which was presented by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, honors its recipients for achievements in financial transparency. LASA parent and principal secretary Karen Foree said AISD deserved the award.

"I've been very impressed with the effort the district is making to let people know about the budget," Foree said. "I'm also impressed with what they've been doing to fix the budget and update their website so people can see [their finances]."

Though this is the second year AISD has gotten the award and received a score of 19 out of the 20 points, LASA government teacher Ronny Risinger said he does not agree with AISD's scoring system concerning financial transparency.

"In my own personal experience, no one seems to be happy with what [AISD] does," Risinger said. "When [AISD] has a little [financial] meeting, no one attends and they don't tell anyone they've already planned it and they unleash a big financial plan."

Fire Academy loses funding, program continues

After facing large cuts to its annual budget, the Austin Fire Department (AFD) decided to cut the LBJ Fire Academy from its sponsored programs, forcing the Austin Independent School District to pick up funding for the program. After initially saying that it would simply allow the program to be cut, AISD realized there was room in the budget for the program to continue.

"The program certainly serves a very important purpose at the school," LBJ fires specialist Matt Holmes said. "It's great that we were able to keep the program around by switching the funding. We were worried what would happen for a while."

This is the first year that the Fire Academy has been funded by a source other than the AFD, but Holmes said it continues to be run the same way.

"Even though AISD has taken over funding we worked very hard to make sure that skills, content, and schedules weren't changed," Holmes said. "The program will continue to be run the same way that it has always been run."

Students work with Safe Place, create video campaign



LASA students role-play an arguing boyfriend and girlfriend as part of their student-created video for Safe Place. photo by Cameron Thum

To raise awareness of bullying and teen dating abuse, LASA students worked with SafePlace to help create short films about healthy relationships. The purpose of the program is to teach students the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships and grow more confident about talking to adults when necessary.

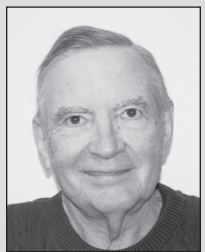
"We're trying to reach out to freshman to talk about relationships in general, and then romantic relationships specifically with older students," LASA junior Abdulkarim Bora said. "These teenagers are going to become adults soon, and it's important that they know how to function in a relationship."

LASA counselor Stacey Hopper first contacted SafePlace, a non-profit that provides shelter for battered abuse victims, to help students. A representative from SafePlace came to the school and educated students about the varying forms of relationship abuse, and then let them create films to reflect what they had learned.

"This is the second year that SafePlace has come to LASA to work with students about dating violence," Hopper said. "We let students decide what they wanted to do for the films, and they decided to use students who go to LASA in the films to make it funnier and more appealing."

The project was a step in earning LASA the designation of a "No Place for Hate" from SafePlace, an indicator that the school is one where preventative measures are taken against bullying and abuse.

Former English professor lectures on "Dubliners"



Former UT professor Joseph Kruppa

In connection with the LASA senior English classes' studies of the book "Dubliners" by James Joyce, former University of Texas English professor Joseph Kruppa lectured to the entire senior class in a morning seminar on Dec. 6. Kruppa praised "Dubliners," a series of short stories written about life in early 20th century Dublin, Ireland, as a work of modern literature and for revealing the intricacies of daily life.

"Dr. Kruppa illustrated the details and the message Joyce was trying to get across," LASA senior Shalom Lee said. "It really just affected my mindset on the book, and he did a great job exploring every niche of the books, from the color and tone, to the characters."

The lecture also served as inspiration to several students including LASA senior Adeline Poris. Poris said the lecture served as inspiration to pursue a career in English.

"Seeing someone base his life on teaching this text made me want to extract as much meaning from it as Mr. Kruppa is able to do," Poris said. "Seeing someone study English is powerful and motivating."

Following the Road

Center helps students apply to college



art by Chris Daemrich

HANNA DORNHOFER
Staff Writer

As the lunch bell rings, LBJ senior Jepte Vergara rushes into the new LBJ/LASA College Center, greeting fellow LBJ students already sitting at computers. LBJ Project Advance College Counselor Yvonne Espinoza moves around the room, helping students edit their resumes and application essays. Vergara uploads his essay to Bowdoin College and clicks the submit button. Grinning broadly, he high-fives Espinoza.

"I'm very blessed to have Ms. Espinoza," Vergara said. "She has given me a lot of help and working with her has been an extraordinary experience."

Espinoza, along with Advise Texas College Adviser Chris Edwards, is helping LBJ students apply to college. Their tasks range from helping students to write essays and resumes to sending reminders about SAT deadlines and providing studying guidelines. Their office is located in the new College Center upstairs in the yellow hallway.

"It's important to have a space where kids can go," Espinoza said. "The college center is always open so kids can come to us at anytime to get help with college stuff."

This year, LBJ's College Center moved upstairs because the former location in room 107 was needed for other purposes. Because LASA's Project Advance College Counselor Jamie Kocian did not have a space for her students to work on college applications, the new College Center was made available to both schools.

"It's really great that LASA also has a college center this year," Espinoza said. "I love working with Ms. Kocian."

Kocian's main office is still located in the LASA front office, but, during lunch, she goes to the College Center to meet with students. She offers application workshops and organizes college visits for LASA seniors.

"Applying to college can be overwhelming and stressful at times," Kocian said. "I especially want seniors to know that there is someone on campus committed to helping them through the college application and financial aid process. I am delighted to be a small part of that process."

Kocian said she sees the new College Center as an

opportunity for LASA students as well as LBJ students to get help on college applications. She provides students access to college and financial aid guidebooks and college-specific literature.

"I have a strong belief that deciding which college to attend is one of the more important decisions an individual will make," Kocian said. "I am here to help."

Espinoza and Edwards focus on motivating students to apply to college and changing the school's culture. They hold presentations in senior English classes and host essay writing workshops throughout the school day.

"It's really important that we advisors exist to [help students apply to college,]" Edwards said. "I also want to help create a college-going community at this school so that students as a group help themselves and help each other."

This year is Edwards' first year at LBJ and second year with Advise Texas, a program that takes college graduates and assigns them to high schools to work as college advisers. Edwards joined the program after graduating two years ago.

"[Advise Texas] was an opportunity to give back to the community and help out in a way that I never got when I was in high school," Edwards said. "I made a lot of stupid mistakes when I went to college, so I want to be able to help students make the right decisions and learn from my mistakes."

Espinoza has been advising students at LBJ about college for the past ten years. She is collaborating with Edwards to host information sessions for students as well as parents and is working individually with students too.

"I think the college center is a huge piece of having a college-going culture at school," Espinoza said. "Having a staff of people who are experienced and can answer questions about college is really important. I'm excited about having a new space this year."

Vergara also said that the College Center was important to him and fellow students. He used computers in the center regularly to work on his applications.

"I just wish that every high school had a college center," Vergara said. "That's something not every student gets. I'm very blessed."

"I want to help create a college-going community at this school so students help each other."

- College Advisor Chris Edwards

LASA hosts wellness lecture for parents

MEGAN MATTSON
co-Editor-in-Chief

In its new series of informational presentations for parents, the LASA Wellness Committee hosted a presentation on Nov. 29 at the Carver Library on the role home life plays in students' self-esteem and eating habits. The committee first hosted a lecture on substance abuse before their second presentation on common signs of eating disorders. LASA parent and Wellness Committee co-chair Ana Irizarry said the main goal of the presentation was to help parents support their children.

"It's about educating people," Irizarry said. "There's misinformation there, and it is important to give families ways to prevent eating disorders."

The presentation was given by Valarie Savage, the program therapist at Cedar Springs Austin Eating Disorder Treatment Center, who based her talk on the book "I'm, Like, SO Fat!" by Dianne Neumark-Sztainer. Savage said it is normal for all high school students to go through the type of stress that can lead to eating disorders.

"There's so many challenges in the world that, at one point in time or another, we're going to all feel overwhelmed," Savage said. "It's so important for us to build healthy coping mechanisms. In high school, you need to be more aware of your strengths so that you can come out of that not just as a survivor, but as a victor."

According to Irizarry, the lecture had a good turnout and offered parents practical tips on how to help students with their body image.

"[The lecture showed] not to focus on the amount of food, but more on the relationships of the people while eating," Irizarry said. "Body image is a lot about people concentrating on how they look. There are better ways to show people that they look good without focusing on food or how much they weigh."

Savage will be available to talk with students individually for sessions one half-day a week starting next semester.

Future lecture topics for parents include resilience, the tie between being gifted and depression and cyberbullying. Savage said it is important to provide this type of information to parents so that they can support the health of their children.

"Hereditry loads the gun and environment pulls the trigger," Savage said. "The role that parents play is to always be an advocate for their child, to recognize where the child is struggling. The best thing a parent can do is be a consultant for them, to help provide options for them to help themselves."

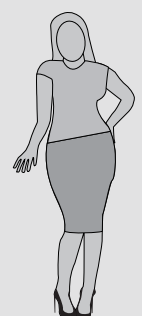
keys to wellness



Eating Habits: More than eating poorly, eating irregularly can lead to binge eating and obesity

Zzz

Sleep: Sleep serves as a time for the body to recharge and release anxiety, helping to curb poor eating habits



Body Image: It is important for family and friends to serve as support mechanisms